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ABSTRACT

When friends and family visited the Douglas family at Brucemore in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, they had the opportunity to enjoy the beauty and grace of the mansion's public places. On its 33 acres, Brucemore had a duck pond, swimming pool, tennis courts, and large formal gardens, besides its 21 extravagant rooms and furnishings. Domestic servants were integral to the sophistication and decorum, much less the functionality, of the Brucemore estate their work touched every part of the estate. During the years the Douglas family made Brucemore their home, 10 or more people maintained the mansion and grounds at any given time. This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places property, "T. M. Sinclair Mansion" (or Brucemore) as well as primary and secondary materials available at Brucemore. The lesson can be used in units on the Gilded Age. It is divided into eight sections: (1) "About This Lesson; (2) "Getting Started: Inquiry Question"; (3) "Setting the Stage: Historical Context"; (4) "Locating the Site: Maps" (Cedar Rapids, 1906; Brucemore Estate, 1911-1928); (5) "Determining the Facts: Readings" (Servants at Brucemore; Danny's Diary; Comparing Period Sources); (6) "Visual Evidence: Images" ( 10 photographs taken at Brucemore); (7) "Putting It All Together: Activities" (Ideal and Real; Built-In Service; Factory Work vs. Domestic Service; Preserving the Past); and (8) "Supplementary Resources." (BT)

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## Teaching with Historic Places

# Back Stairs at Brucemore: Life as Servants in Early 20th-Century America

SO 034 724

**Teaching with Historic Places**
**National Register of Historic Places**
**National Park Service**
**1849 C. Street, N.W., Suite NC400**
**Washington, D.C. 20240**

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# Back Stairs at Brucemore: Life as Servants in early 20th-Century America

*(Courtesy of Brucemore, Inc., Cedar Rapids, IA)*

W hen friends and family visited the Douglas family at Brucemore in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, they had the opportunity to enjoy the beauty and grace of the mansion's public spaces. Upon arriving, guests would pass through graceful iron gates and enter a 33-acre wonderland. Outside, they could explore a duck pond, swimming pool, tennis courts, and large formal gardens. Inside, guests would be greeted in the mansion's great hall with its warm colors, rich fabrics, and dramatic mural. While friends and family enjoyed this extravagant home, they probably did not give much thought to the work that went into maintaining this privileged lifestyle.

Domestic servants were integral to the sophistication and decorum, much less the functionality, of the Brucemore estate. Their work touched every part of the estate. The 21 rooms in the mansion needed to be dusted and swept, and the carpets and furniture cleaned. The children required supervision. Laundry had to be done. There were meals to be cooked, dishes to be cleaned, and silver to be polished. The large lawn had to be trimmed and the garden



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weeded. The family's farm animals required food and care. Carriages and cars needed maintenance.

During the years that the Douglas family made Brucemore their home, 10 or more people maintained the mansion and grounds at any given time. These people allowed members of the family to pursue hobbies, artistic work, and community service. Understanding the lives of these important, yet virtually unseen residents allows one to explore the "back stairs at Brucemore."

**The lesson is based on the T. M. Sinclair Mansion (Brucemore), one of the thousands of properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places.**

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# About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places property, "T. M. Sinclair Mansion," (also known as Brucemore) as well as primary and secondary materials available at Brucemore. Melanie Alexander, former Program Director at Brucemore and Jennifer Pustz, Brucemore Historian, wrote the lesson. The lesson was edited by the Teaching with Historic Places staff. This lesson is one in a series that brings the important stories of historic places into the classrooms across the country.

**Where it fits into the curriculum**

***Topics:*** This lesson could be used in units on the Gilded Age, including the development of industrial America, changes in urban living, and the experiences of immigrants and women.

***Time period:*** Early 20th century

**See attached Relevant United States History Standards for Grades 5-12**

**Objectives for students**

1) To explore the lifestyles and activities of the employees at Brucemore.

2) To compare and contrast working as a servant in a private home with working in a factory or shop.

3) To research ads and articles depicting servants in the early 20th century and consider how stereotypes affect the expectations of employers for employees.

4) To identify and research a historic building in the local community and determine how its use changed over time.

**Materials for students**

The materials listed below either can be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students. The maps and images appear twice: in a smaller, low-resolution version with associated questions and alone in a larger version.

1) two maps of Cedar Rapids and the Brucemore estate;

2) three readings about the Douglas family and their servants at Brucemore, and contemporary documents presenting perspectives on working in a factory versus working as a servant;

3) three photographs of the Brucemore mansion and the Douglas family maid Henrietta;

4) three drawings of floor plans for the Brucemore mansion;

5) one illustration from the Ladies Home Journal;

6) one chart relating to Douglas family employees;

7) two documents relating to family accounting ledgers.

**Visiting the site**

Brucemore is one of 21 historic properties owned and operated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The mansion is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and on Sunday from noon to 3:00 p.m. It is closed on Mondays, the month of January, and major holidays. For more information, please contact Brucemore, 2160 Linden Drive SE, Cedar Rapids, IA 52403, or visit the Brucemore web page at http://www.brucemore.org/

**United States History Standards for Grades 5-12**
***Back Stairs at Brucemore:***
***Life as Servants in early 20th-Century America***
**relates to the following National Standards for History:**

**Era 6: The Development of the Industrial United States (1870-1900)**

- Standard 2A- The student understands the sources and experiences of the new immigrants.
- Standard 3A- The student understands how the "second industrial revolution" changed the nature and conditions of work.

# Getting Started

# Inquiry Question

*(Courtesy of Brucemore, Inc., Cedar Rapids, Iowa)*

**What is this woman wearing? What do you think her profession is? Where might she work?**

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# Teaching with Historic Places

## Photo Analysis Worksheet

**Step 1:**
Examine the photograph for 10 seconds. How would you describe the photograph?

**Step 2:**
Divide the photograph into quadrants and study each section individually. What details--such as people, objects, activities--do you notice?

**Step 3:**
What other information--such as time period, location, season, reason photo was taken--can you gather from the photo?

**Step 4:**
How would you revise your first description of the photo using the information noted in Steps 2 and 3?

**Step 5:**
What questions do you have about the photograph? How might you find answers to these questions?

# Setting the Stage

The introduction of railroads in Iowa in the late 1850s created opportunities for industry to develop in rural areas. By the early 20th century, Cedar Rapids housed several large agriculture-related industries: meatpacking, cornstarch processing, and oatmeal milling. The railroads and plentiful factory jobs also resulted in significant population growth for Cedar Rapids. Many of these new residents were immigrants, the largest group coming from western Bohemia (now a region of the Czech Republic).

The increasing number of factories producing goods and department stores selling them had a major impact on the labor market between 1850 and 1925. As America's middle-class population grew, so did the demand for servants in their households. Although a middle-class family could not hire a large staff, the ability to hire at least one servant was a badge of status. The "maid-of-all-work" in the middle-class household was responsible for everything from cooking to childcare to laundry.

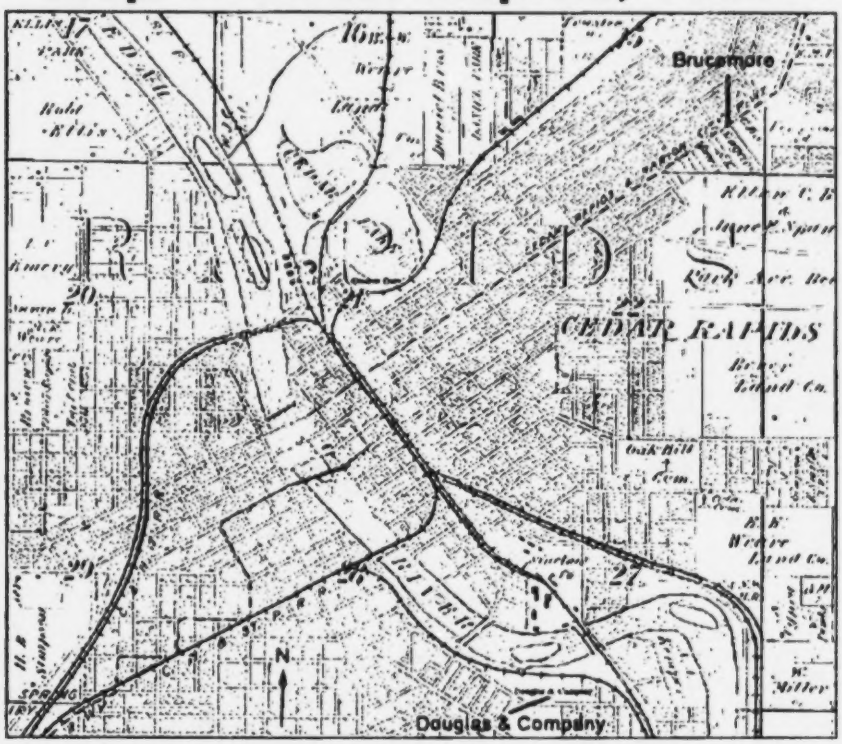
In the mid 1800s, many housewives hired "help" (often American-born girls) to assist with physically demanding chores. However, as cities and industries began to flourish, local women who worked as house help could easily find other jobs in shops and factories. By the end of the century, immigrants and African Americans increasingly made up the highest percentage of servants in the Northeast and in the larger cities in the Midwest.

Some of these national trends are reflected at the Brucemore estate in the lives of the Douglas family and their servants. The family's cornstarch processing plant benefited from access to railroads, which brought their product to national markets. The wealth they gained provided the family with a 33-acre estate at the edge of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Like other wealthy families living on country estates, the Douglases were able to escape the commotion of the industrialized city. Their leisurely lifestyle depended upon the work of servants.

The lives of individual servants often can be difficult to trace. In some cases, city directories and census records may provide the only source of information. Fortunately, the stories of several servants at Brucemore have been better preserved. These stories can be pieced together through sources like the nanny's diary, photos, letters, account books, and other documents.

# Locating the Site

## Map 1: Cedar Rapids, 1906.




*(Courtesy of The History Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa)*

The Brucemore mansion is approximately 2.5 to 3 miles from the Douglas & Company plant. The Douglases had a coachman or chauffeur to drive them, and the family had cars by 1910.

**Questions for Map 1**

1. Using a school atlas, locate Cedar Rapids on an Iowa State map.

2. Examine Map 1. Note the close proximity of the railroad to Douglas & Company. How might the company benefit from easy access to railroad transportation?

3. Where is the Brucemore estate in relation to the city center (Ind. District)? (Note that the estate is labeled "Singclair," a misspelling



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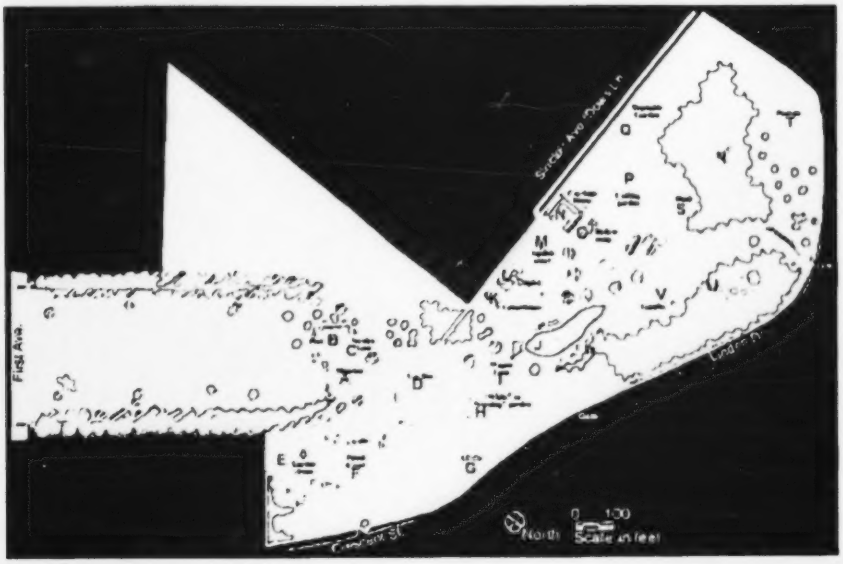
of the original owner's name, Sinclair.) Why do you think the family chose to live away from the city center?

4. What railway passes by the Brucemore estate? How are the markings different for this railway versus the other railroad lines? This line offers local streetcar service.

5. How might the location of the home and its distance from the industrial city center influence the lives of the family and servants that lived there?

# Locating the Site

# Map 2: Brucemore Estate, 1911-1928.




*(Courtesy of Brucemore, Inc, Cedar Rapids, Iowa)*

**Map Key:**

| | |
|---|---|
| A. Mansion | L. Duplex |
| B. Pool | M. Squash Court |
| C. Service Yard | N. Carriage House |
| D. Garden | O. Chicken Coop |
| E. Garden House | P. Cutting Garden |
| F. Paved Court | Q. Vegetable Garden |
| G. Alfalfa | R. Dump |
| H. "White" or "evening" garden | S. Shed |
| | T. Pasture |
| I. Wagon Lane | U. Gazebo/Path |
| J. Pond | V. Gazebo |
| K. Greenhouse | W. Path |

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**Questions for Map 2**

1. Why might Brucemore be considered a "country estate"? Using Map 2, locate the features listed on the Map Key. Next to each item listed above, describe the work needed to maintain them.

2. Locate the servants' duplex. The head gardener and servants with families usually lived there. What do you think were some of the advantages and disadvantages of living on the estate with their employers?

3. Some of the servant staff lived in the mansion. What might be some of the advantages and disadvantages of living in the same house as their employers?

4. Using the scale provided on Map 2, determine how many feet it is from First Ave. to the mansion. Why might the mansion be set back so far from the main street?

# Determining the Facts

# Reading 1: Servants at Brucemore

At first glance, Brucemore appears to be a monument to a few wealthy owners. But a closer look uncovers much more. Brucemore's story is about hundreds of immigrants drawn to Cedar Rapids to work in the families' businesses. It is about new technology and the expansion of railroads that brought an economic boom to the Midwest. It is about a servant staff whose labor granted their employers a privileged lifestyle.

George Bruce Douglas had a strong influence on the industrial development of Cedar Rapids. He worked first in his father's cereal business, which became The Quaker Oats Company. George and his brother started Douglas & Company, which grew into one of the largest corn processing plants in the world.

When George and Irene Douglas moved to Brucemore in 1906, they had two daughters, Margaret and Ellen. Another daughter, Barbara, was born shortly afterward. The Douglases personalized the estate to meet their needs as a growing family and transformed their home into a fully functioning country estate. They increased the size of the property from 10 to 33 acres and added the guesthouse, servants' duplex, greenhouse, carriage house, squash court/bookbindery, tennis court, pool, pond, and formal garden.

The Douglases employed many servants to work in the house, on the grounds, and for other responsibilities. Like most large homes built in the 1880s, the mansion had clearly defined areas for servants, including a separate entrance, dining area, and set of stairs. Servants could become virtually invisible as their work and living spaces could be closed off from the family's side of the house. Two rooms on the mansion's third floor served as servant bedrooms. Usually, the butler, cook, and maids shared these rooms. The head gardener and his family lived in the servants' duplex on the estate. The nanny's room was on the second floor next to the nursery.

Inside the mansion, duties were numerous, and a specialized staff of five to six handled the day-to-day operations of the house. Coming with his family from England in 1912, Alfred Batten was the Douglases' butler for eleven years. He held one of the higher positions among the servants. His responsibilities would have included answering the door, serving formal meals in the dining room, and taking care of the silver and other precious items stored in the butler's pantry. His wife Ivy also worked for the Douglases as a maid. Her duties might have included helping Mrs. Douglas bathe and dress as well as general straightening and cleaning. A Swedish cook, Mabel Seay took charge of the kitchen and the elaborate meals that were part of the formal dinners at Brucemore. Additional

maids most likely assisted her with the more tedious aspects of food preparation as well as cleaning the mountain of dishes that resulted from a formal meal. Alfred's brother Bert was the Douglases' chauffeur from 1915 to 1937, surpassing all other staff in length of employment. He drove the cars but also maintained them, which required an understanding of mechanics. Alfred and Bert's sisters and nieces also worked occasionally when extra help was needed for large parties.

In addition to the specialized house staff, the Douglases hired men to care for their gardens and grounds. The head gardener, usually the highest paid employee, was an important part of the staff. His job included choosing plants, operating the greenhouse, and planning the care of the grounds. In the spring and summer, he supervised five to eight men. In the winter, his responsibilities included snow removal and firing the boilers in the mansion, greenhouse, and carriage house. Archie White, the Douglases' last head gardener, worked at Brucemore for nearly sixteen years. Archie, who was born in Jamaica, British West Indies, lived in the servants' duplex with his wife, Jeanie, and children, Agnes and Edward.

At Brucemore, a larger staff allowed for greater specialization in jobs but also some sharing of tasks. These servants enjoyed greater flexibility and more personal time than the typical maid-of-all-work. Their hard work provided the Douglases with a comfortable lifestyle and made it possible for them to pursue recreational and community service activities.

**Questions for Reading 1**

1. Create a chart listing all of the employees mentioned in Reading 1 and what their responsibilities were.

2. What caused an economic boom in the midwest? Why were immigrants drawn to Cedar Rapids?

3. At any given time, a mix of immigrants and American-born servants lived and worked at Brucemore. What are the nationalities of the Douglas employees mentioned in the reading?

4. Why do you think the mansion was built with separate areas for servants?

5. How might working for the Douglases and other wealthy families differ from working as a maid-of-all-work? If needed, refer to Setting the Stage.

*Reading 1 was compiled from Faye Dudden,* Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America *(Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University*

*Press, 1983); David M. Katzman,* Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America *(New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Daniel Sutherland,* Americans and their Servants: Domestic Service in the United States from 1800 to 1920 *(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).*

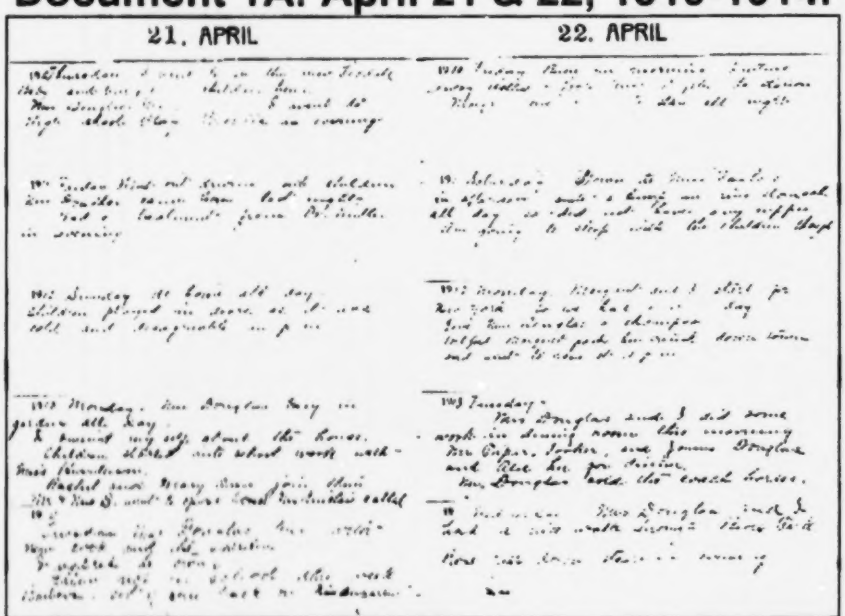
# Determining the Facts

# Reading 2: Danny's Diary

*The following excerpts are from the diary of Ella McDannel, nanny for the Douglas family from 1909 to 1930. The diary entries span from 1910 to 1914, however the layout is unusual. Each date has a separate page with sections/spaces for five years (1910-1914) worth of writing below the date.*

*Of the Douglases' employees, their nanny had a particularly close relationship to the family. Ella McDannel, fondly nicknamed "Danny" by the Douglas girls, worked for the family for over twenty years. She was an American-born woman, the same age as Mrs. Douglas, and had a nursing degree. Danny's primary duties involved caring for the three girls. In her diary, she documented their milestones, health, birthdays, and other events. Danny's diary also describes her daily activities and those of other servants. It suggests that even though servants had specialized jobs, they shared some duties and assisted one another. Danny's tasks included cleaning, dusting, sewing, and washing Mrs. Douglas's hair. She stayed with the family long after they needed the services of a nanny. In her later years at Brucemore, the city directories list her as "maid" or "housekeeper." She left the family by 1930 but remained in contact with them for the rest of her life.*

## Document 1A: April 21 & 22, 1910-1914.



21. APRIL

22. APRIL

*(Courtesy of Brucemore, Inc, Cedar Rapids, Iowa)*



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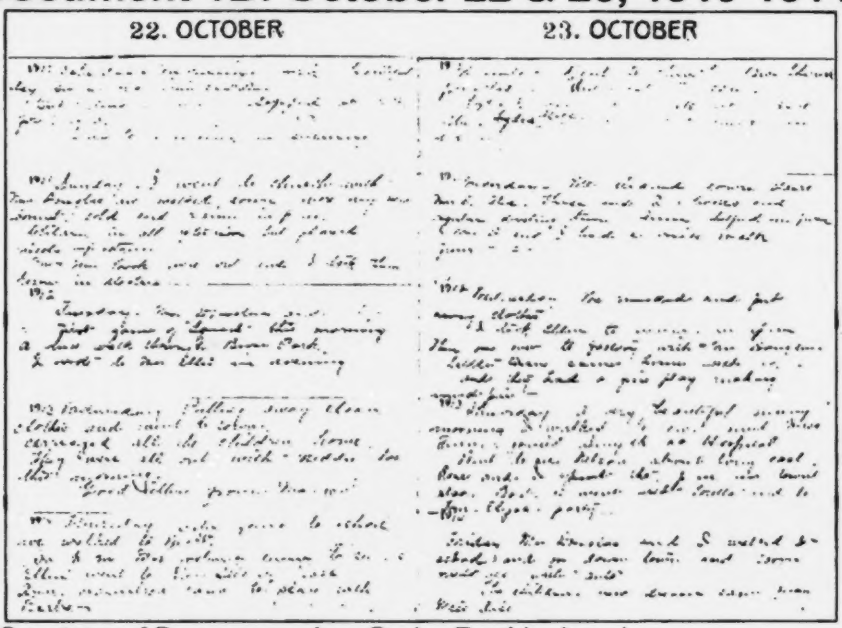
# Document 1B: October 22 & 23, 1910-1914.




*(Courtesy of Brucemore, Inc, Cedar Rapids, Iowa)*

**Questions for Reading 2**

1. Add Danny to the employee chart created in Reading 1 and list her job responsibilities based on her diary.

2. What activities did Danny enjoy during her free time?

3. In general, how would you describe her lifestyle?

4. Based on Danny's description of her daily activities, do you think her job would be preferable to a maid-of-all-work? Explain your answer.

5. What did you learn about the life of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas and their children from reading Danny's diary?

6. What comparisons can you make about life in the 1910s and today?

*Reading 2 was excerpted from the diary of Ella McDannel. Courtesy of Brucemore, Inc., Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Transcribed by Brucemore Historian Jennifer Pustz, 2001.*

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# Transcript of Document 1A: Danny's Diary April 21 & 22, 1910-1914.

| 21. April | 22. April |
|---|---|
| 1910 Thursday - I went to see the new Tisdale baby and brought the children home.<br>Mrs. Douglas - Margaret and I went to High School Play - "Priscilla" in evening. | 1910 Friday - Busy in morning putting away clothes - took Miss Duphe to station<br>Margaret Powel came to stay all night. |
| 1911 Friday - Went out driving with children<br>Mrs. Douglas came home last night<br>Had a treatment from Dr. Miller in evening. | 1911 Saturday - Down to Miss Taylors in afternoon quite a lump in my stomach all day so did not have any supper am going to sleep with children though |
| 1912 Sunday - At home all day.<br>Children played in doors as it was cold and disagreeable in p.m. | 1912 Monday - Margaret and I start for New York - so we had a busy day<br>Gave Mrs. Douglas a shampoo.<br>Helped Margaret pack her trunk down town and went to train at 10 p.m. |
| 1913 Monday - Mrs. Douglas busy in garden all day.<br>I busied myself about the house.<br>Children started into school work with Miss Henderson.<br>Rachel and Mary Ann joined them<br>Mr. & Mrs. D. went to opera house<br>Mrs. Sinclair called | 1913 Tuesday - Mrs. Douglas and I did some work in dining room this morning<br>Mr. Piper, Tooker, and James Douglas and Alec her[e] for dinner.<br>Mr. Douglas sold the coach horses. |
| 1914 Tuesday - Mrs. Douglas busy with new cook and the garden<br>I walked to town<br>Ellen not in school this week<br>Barbara - sort of gone back on Kindergarten | 1914 Wednesday - Mrs. Douglas and I had a nice walk through Bever Park.<br>Rose fell down stairs in evening. |

# Transcript of Document 1B: Danny's Diary October 22 & 23, 1910-1914.

| **22. October** | **23. October** |
|---|---|
| 1910 Saturday - Mornings work - beautiful day Anna out with children. Out riding in p.m. stopped at Y.W. [C.A.] for Mrs. D. Over to Mrs. Niles in evening | 1910 Sunday - Went to church. Bro Sherrick preached for "Rededication" of church. Lydia E was out in afternoon - and she, Alice, and I went to church in evening. |
| 1911 Sunday - I went to church with Mrs. Douglas we walked down wore my new bonnet cold and rainy in p.m. Children in all afternoon but played nicely up stairs. Mr. & Mrs. Cook were out and I took them home in electric. | 1911 Monday - We cleaned down stairs Mrs. D. Alec. Theresa and I - books and regular dusting time. Anna helped in p.m. Mrs. D. and I had a nice walk from 11 - 12 - |
| 1912 Tuesday - Mrs. Douglas and I had our first game of "Squash" this morning A nice walk through Bever Park. I wrote to Mrs. Ellis in evening. | 1912 Wednesday - We mended and put away clothes. I took Ellen to music in p.m. Then on over to factory with Mrs. Douglas - Little Anne came home with us and they had a fine play making mud pies - |
| 1913 Wednesday - Putting away clean clothes and went to town. Carriaged all the children home. They were all out with Neddie too this morning. Good letters from Margaret | 1913 Thursday - A very beautiful sunny morning I walked to town meet Miss Twin. Joined Smyth at Hospital Went to see Nelson about long coat. Rose and I spent the p.m. in town also. Barbara went with Loretta and to Tom. Elijah's party. |
| 1914 Thursday - After going to school we walked to Y.W. [C.A.] In p.m. Mrs. Holmes came to see us Ellen went to story telling class Ann Hamilton came to play with Barbara | 1914 Friday - Mrs. Douglas and I walked to school and on down town and Horn met us with auto The childrens new dresser came from Miss Rice. |

# Determining the Facts

# Reading 3: Comparing Period Sources

*The following excerpts present two opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of working as a servant. Both written in the early 1900s, each author compares and contrasts working in the home with working in shops and factories.*

**"Housework versus Shop and Factories"**

To summarize the advantages of the houseworker:

The excess of wages above living expenses is greater than for girls in shops and restaurants, and taken from year to year is almost as great as in mills and factories.
The work is more healthful than in mills, factories or shops.
The demand for workers is little affected by prosperous or dull times.
The older and more thoughtful women of all occupations recognize another advantage: Houseworkers are better prepared for contented lives in homes of their own. The other girls not only know little about the care of a house, but they form a taste for the excitement of numbers that often leads them to continue work after marriage. 'The mill is the last place for my girl; housework learns a woman to be a woman,' said a weaver, forty years of whose life had been spent in the mill.
The objections to housework seem to be: The hours are long and indefinite. There is invariably Sunday work. Work is not often specialized. Each household has its own method of doing things.
There is no chance to rise to a better place.
There is little opportunity to visit friends, and small satisfaction in receiving them.
The relations with employers seem more irritating than in other occupations.
There is a solitude that is the result of continual contact with people with whom they have nothing in common.
In the opinion of working girls the advantages do not weigh against the disadvantages, so that under existing circumstances any attempt to attract intelligent girls to housework seems to be futile.

*Excerpted from Mary E. Trueblood, "Housework versus Shop and Factories,"* The Independent, *November 13, 1902, page 2693.*

*Mary E. Trueblood taught at Mt. Holyoke College and at the time of this writing had just finished an investigation for the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor regarding employment of women in the state.*

**"Out of Work"**

A glance at the columns of advertisements reveals the fact that it is housework that invariably demands a 'good, strong girl.' Employees say 'stair-climbing ten to twenty times a day is thought nothing of,' and yet most women know that this is most injurious. In many instances we found girls working under an unusual physical strain, and yet shop girls and factory employees have received the legislation for hours, seats, and sanitation because of the fond belief that housework regulates itself. A few comparisons have been made of the healthful conditions in the factory and household, and they do not favor the latter so much as would be expected. A recent study by an experienced observer shows that housework is not necessarily good all-around work, and that among such employees, weak backs, and women's disease are prevalent.

In the matter of healthful exercise, housework has scarcely been questioned. We doubt if many other occupations like this consist of anything less desirable than washing in steam rooms and going directly into the open air. Certainly breathing the dust from sweeping and beating rugs would not be advocated as an ideal form of exercise. Then there are employees, thousands of them, who do not go out of the house between their 'times off.' How does this compare with vigorous outdoor walks which a factory girl must take to her car or to her home each day? The great majority of employers stipulate that the rest time of an employee must be spent in the house, and one employer said, where we were filling a position; 'Why, I should want you a dozen times if I thought you were out of the house.' This was in response to a simple request for a walk around the block. Another said, 'A walk during the afternoon! Don't she get enough during work?' But every one will admit that recreation implies at least change and usually separation from work. The average healthy woman knows that two or three consecutive days in the house without outdoor walks or drives, or social contact, or at least outdoor breathing, make her depressed, restless, and oftentimes irritable. This is not a question of mistress and maid, but of nerves and muscles and bodily functions, which no one has yet found to be different for different social classes. Certainly housework as performed in the average home cannot rank high in view of what science and experience are teaching of the best forms of exercise, and certainly play and games, the greatest of all recreations, are totally eliminated from the houseworker's sphere. The factory and store girls have these in their working girls' club, settlement gymnasium, or recreation centre.

*Excerpted from Frances Kellor,* Out of Work, *1904, pages 133-135.*

*Frances Kellor wrote a regular column on domestic service for the popular women's magazine* The Ladies' Home Journal *and conducted an investigation of employment offices for servants, which resulted in her book* Out of Work.

**Questions for Reading 3**

1. From the articles above and classroom textbooks, list some of the jobs available to women at the time this article was written. Do you think these jobs would be preferable to housework? Why or why not?

2. Make a chart showing the advantages and disadvantages of housework versus work outside the home for each excerpt. What conclusions can you make about each author's opinion of housework based on these articles? Do you agree or disagree with them? Why?

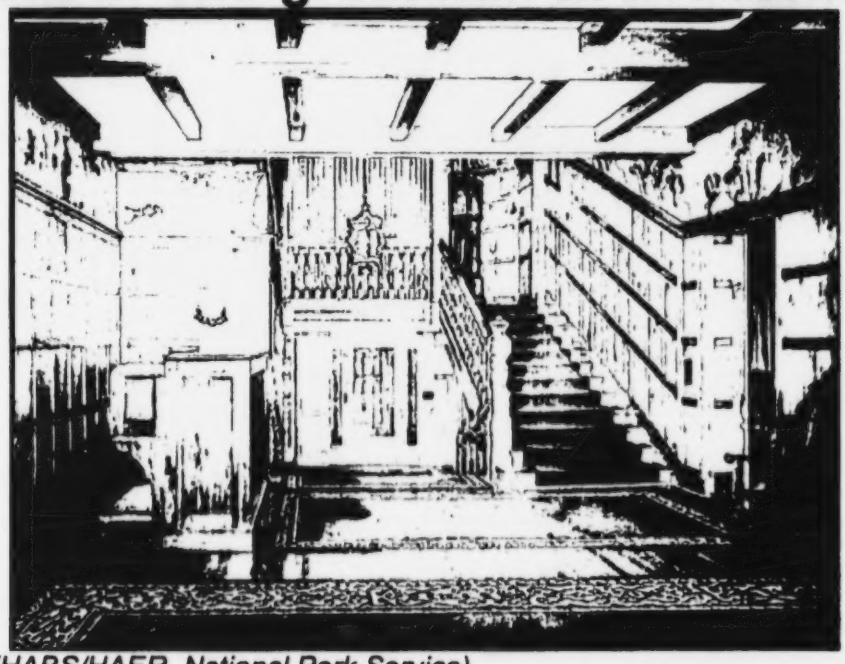
3. How does each author characterize the health benefits of housework? Are the arguments presented similar or not? Explain your answer.

# Visual Evidence

## Photo 1: The Brucemore estate today.

*(Courtesy of Brucemore, Inc., Cedar Rapids, Iowa)*

# Photo 2: The great hall at Brucemore.



*(HABS/HAER, National Park Service)*

When the Douglas family moved to the mansion in 1906, the estate was renamed Brucemore. The family hired Chicago architect Howard van Doren Shaw, who specialized in North Shore mansions, to oversee the needed renovations (which exceeded $30,000). Shaw relocated the entrance to the south facade (see Photo 1) and built a terrace on the north side, which faced the extensive lawn. Inside, butternut paneling and ceiling beams were added to the great hall. In the 1920s, the Douglases enhanced this space with a dramatic mural depicting scenes from Richard Wagner's opera cycle *The Ring of the Nibelung*.

Domestic servants were integral to the sophistication and decorum, much less the functionality, of the Brucemore estate. Their work touched every part of the estate, including the 21 rooms in the mansion.

**Questions for Photos 1 & 2**

1. Examine Photos 1 and 2 and read the accompanying caption, what are your impressions of this home?

2. Does Photo 1 help provide a sense of the mansion's scale? Does it help create a better understanding of the amount of work involved in maintaining such an estate? Why or why not?



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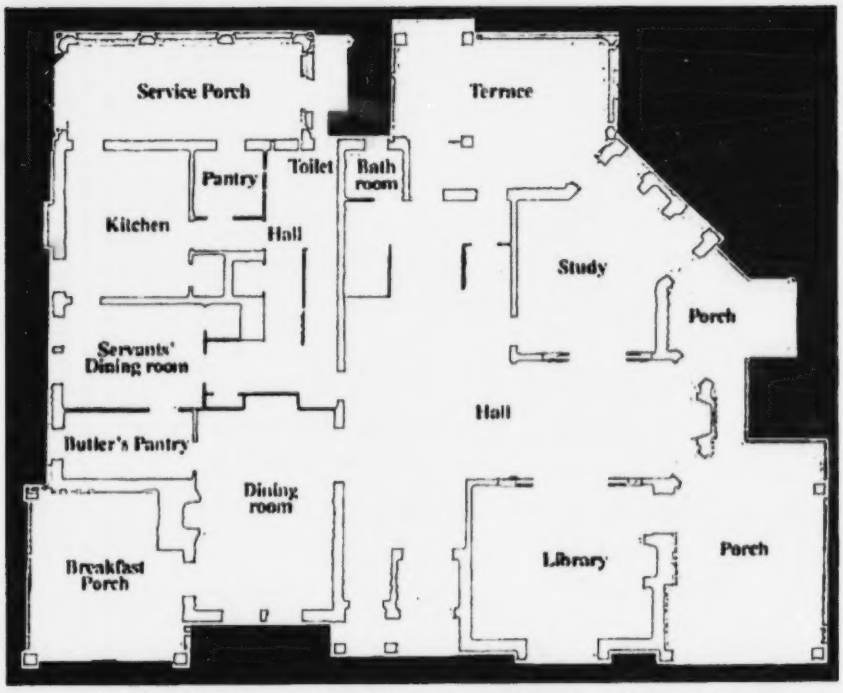
3. How would you describe the great hall in Photo 2? What kind of impression did the Douglas family want to give their guests upon entering the home? How might your experience be different if you walked in through the servants' entrance to the home?

# Visual Evidence

## Drawing 1: Floor plan of mansion--main level.




*(Adapted from 1919 floor plans of Brucemore mansion, courtesy of Brucemore, Inc., Cedar Rapids, Iowa)*

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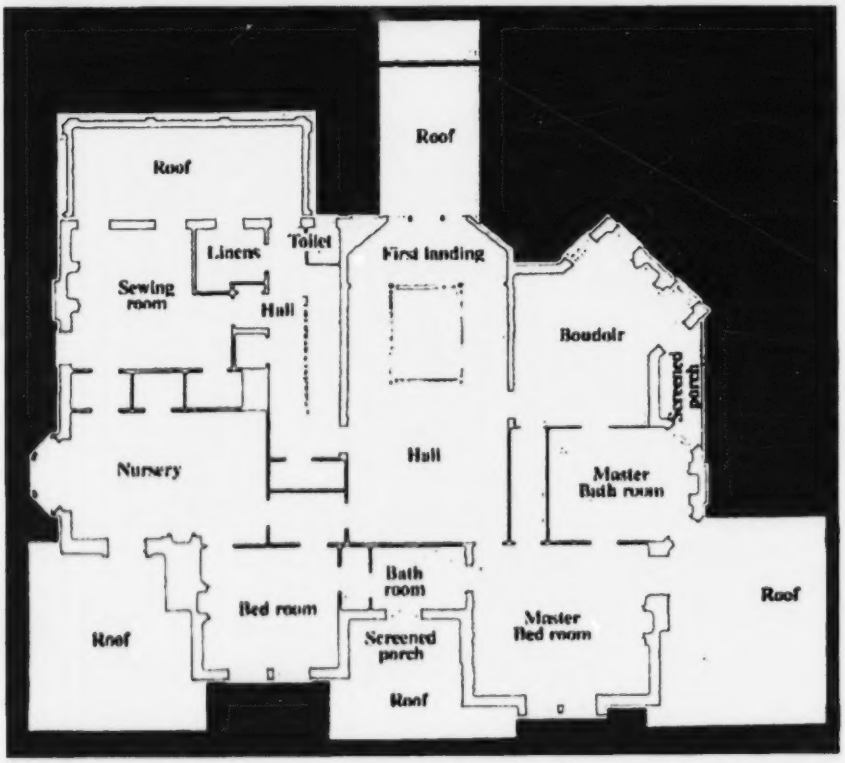
# Drawing 2: Floor plan of mansion--second level.




*(Adapted from 1919 floor plans of Brucemore mansion, courtesy of Brucemore, Inc., Cedar Rapids, Iowa)*

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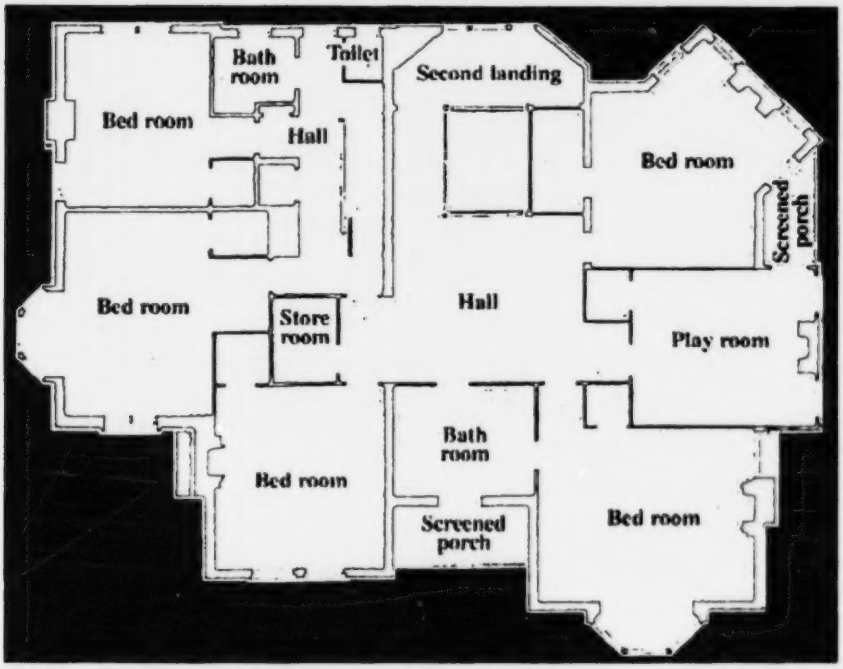
# Drawing 3: Floor plan of mansion--third level.




*(Adapted from 1919 floor plans of Brucemore mansion, courtesy of Brucemore, Inc., Cedar Rapids, Iowa)*

Pink/lighter areas on the floor plans are considered "servant spaces" and blue/darker areas are considered "family/public spaces."

**Questions for Drawings 1-3**

1. Carefully examine each floor plan of the mansion. Make a list of spaces used by servants and by family. What kinds of spaces are considered "servant spaces?" Where are the servant spaces? What percentage of the house is devoted to servants versus family?

2. Why do you think there are two sets of stairs? Which rooms are easily accessible from the servants' staircase?

3. How many doors from servant spaces on each level lead to family/public space?

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4. Do you think the house was designed having servants in mind? Why or why not?

5. From the employer's point-of-view, what concerns would you have about live-in servants? From the servant's point-of-view, what concerns would you have about living in your employer's home?

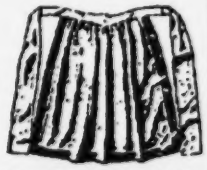
## Visual Evidence

# Illustration 1: Uniform for maids.

## The Correct Apron for Maids

Designs by
Antoinette Rouland

Drawings by
Emma Troth



EVERY housekeeper should realize that the appearance of the maids in her house is an indication of her good taste and management, as they, in a measure, set the standard of the establishment from the moment the door is opened. And it need not be a matter of expense to have them well dressed; it is simply one of judgment in providing the correct things to wear on different occasions.

Simply-made black dresses of cloth or cashmere with white aprons are generally the most all-around, useful and becoming dresses for maids, although a pretty shade of gray may be chosen at the discretion of the mistress. This, however, is something of an innovation and might be considered for special occasions where an extra dress could be offered.

The styles in collars and cuffs vary but little from the recognized plain linen collar with its smart bow tie, except where the apron is trimmed with bands of embroidery; in this case a becoming set of turn-over collar and cuffs to match gives a color finishing touch. This idea is illustrated in two of the figures at the top of the page—the one with the tray and the other with the housecleaning. Above the bow should be made of lace, muslin or of embroidery if the plaited small frill is desired.

WITH the use of such durable materials as linen, batiste, fine fibers and dotted Swiss muslin aprons do not need replenishing more than once a year. The new wirestrings for the large aprons are Hamburg edgings in simple designs such as scallops and dots, and for laundering use the solid conventional patterns also, as they withstand the wear and tear of frequent launderings much better than the open-worked, lacey or crystal patterns.

For a plain finish, deep hems with or without edgings are in perfectly good taste, like the one shown in the upper right-hand corner on the chambermaid's apron. This and the one next to it have been made very attractive and becoming by the trimmed bands which extend from the waist-line in the front over the shoulders to meet the strings in the back. The apron at the extreme left of the top row is one so generally useful that it can hardly be classified. It is suitable alike for chambermaid, ordinary serving, or for afternoons too. The best material for it is muslin of medium weight.

Careful lining at the waist-line is necessary in the making of becoming aprons, and they should be laundered with very little starch, but above everything else they should be spotless.

Patterns for these aprons cannot be supplied, but any information that is desired regarding them will be given by Miss Rouland if a self-addressed, stamped envelope is inclosed for the reply.

*(Article from the* Ladies Home Journal, *March 1910, page 47)*





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**Questions for Illustration 1**

1. Based on the drawings of the maids at the top of the ad, what are some of the occasions they suggest require a specific uniform?

2. Based on the depiction of maids in this article, what characteristics do you think employers wanted in a servant? What does the ad indicate that a maid's appearance suggests?

3. Do you think articles and advertisements influenced what people thought about servants? Why or why not?

# Visual Evidence

## Photo 3: Henrietta, maid to Douglas family, c. 1907.

*(Courtesy of Brucemore, Inc., Cedar Rapids, Iowa)*

**Questions for Photo 3**

1. Based on what you learned from Illustration 1, what kind of work do you associate with Henrietta's clothing?



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2. Based on Henrietta's photo, do you think she fits the image portrayed in Illustration 1? Explain your answer.

3. Why might an employer want servants to wear this kind of clothing?

4. Imagine what it was like to wear a maid's uniform. How would you feel dressed like this in public? What tasks might be physically difficult to complete in this uniform?

# Visual Evidence

## Chart 1: Douglas servants.

| Name of Servant | Birthplace | Position | Years of Employment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Rosalie Loquet | Unknown | Maid | 1907 |
| Lucien Abadie | Unknown | Butler | 1907 |
| Henrietta Abadie | Unknown | Maid | 1907 |
| Samuel Ross | Ireland | Coachman | 1907-1913 |
| George Holmes | Illinois | Head Gardener | 1907-1910 |
| Elijah B. Loomis | Ohio | Gardener | 1907-1918 |
| Johanna Lau | Germany | Cook | 1/2 year 1908, 1909, 1911; 1910 |
| Lenore (Swift) St. Cricq | Vermont | Nurse/Maid | 1907, 1910; 1/2 year 1909, 1911 |
| Armand St. Cricq | France | Butler | 1/2 year 1909, 1911; 1910 |
| Ella McDannel | Iowa | Nurse | 1909-1929 |
| Bertha Meyers | WI - German parents | Maid | 1/2 year 1911, 1912; 1913-1919 |
| Alexander Huart | Unknown | Butler | 1/2 year 1911, 1913; 1912 |
| Hilda Huart | Unknown | Maid | 1/2 year 1911, 1913; 1912 |
| Andrew Krieg | Germany | Gardener | 1911-1919 |
| Loretta Byers | WI - German parents | Cook | 1/2 year 1913; 1914-1916 |
| Rose Bellet | France | Maid | 1908; 1913-1918 |
| Lucian Bellet | Italy | Butler | 1908; 1/2 year 1913; 1914-1918 |
| Charles Horn | England | Chauffeur | 1/2 year 1913, 1914 |
| Joe Podhasky | IA-Bohemian parents | Houseman | 1/2 year 1914; 1915-1920 |
| Rose Podhasky | IA-Bohemian parents | Cook | 1919-1920 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Albert Batten | England | Chauffeur | 1915-1937 |
| Anton Martini | Unknown | Head Gardener | 1/2 year 1920, 1921 |
| Archie White | Jamaica, British WI | Head Gardener | 1/2 year 1921; 1922-1937 |
| James Bracha | Bohemia | Houseman | 1924-1928 |
| Hans Guterich | Germany | Butler | 1924-1925 |
| Mabel Seay | Sweden | Cook | 1924-1931 |
| Alfred Batten | England | Butler | 1926-1937 |
| Ivy Batten | England | Maid | 1926-1937 |

*Unless otherwise indicated, assume year-round employment.*
*(Information compiled by Brucemore Historian Jennifer Pustz, 2000)*

**Questions for Chart 1**

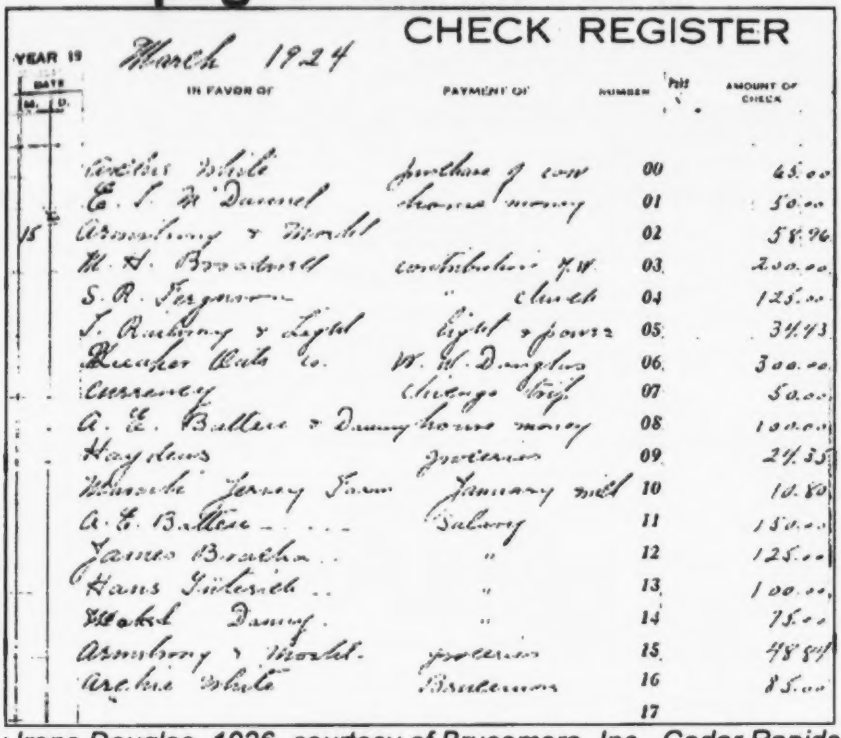
1. Study Chart 1. Servants from what nationality made up the largest portion of the Douglas family staff? How many American-born servants did they have on staff?

2. Which servants stayed with the Douglases for more than ten years?

3. What does their length of their employment tell us about the Douglases?

# Visual Evidence

## Document 2A: Douglas account book pages--March 1924.



CHECK REGISTER

YEAR 19 March 1924

| DATE M. | D. | IN FAVOR OF | PAYMENT OF | NUMBER | PAID ✓ | AMOUNT OF CHECK |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Archie Wiste | purchase of cow | 00 | | 45.00 |
| | | E. I. & Daniel | house money | 01 | | 50.00 |
| | 15 | Armstrong & Merkel | | 02 | | 58.96 |
| | | W. H. Broadwell | contribution for W | 03 | | 200.00 |
| | | S. R. Ferguson | " church | 04 | | 125.00 |
| | | I. Railway & Light | light & power | 05 | | 34.43 |
| | | Quaker Oats Co. | W. H. Douglas | 06 | | 300.00 |
| | | Currency | Chicago Exp. | 07 | | 50.00 |
| | | A. E. Ballard & Danny | house money | 08 | | 100.00 |
| | | Haydens | groceries | 09 | | 24.35 |
| | | Winneshiek Farmers | January mill | 10 | | 10.80 |
| | | A. E. Ballard | Salary | 11 | | 150.00 |
| | | James Bracken | " | 12 | | 125.00 |
| | | Hans Gilbertson | " | 13 | | 100.00 |
| | | Merkel Danny | " | 14 | | 75.00 |
| | | Armstrong & Merkel | groceries | 15 | | 48.84 |
| | | Archie Wiste | Brakeman | 16 | | 85.00 |
| | | | | 17 | | |

*(Kept by Irene Douglas, 1926, courtesy of Brucemore, Inc., Cedar Rapids, Iowa)*



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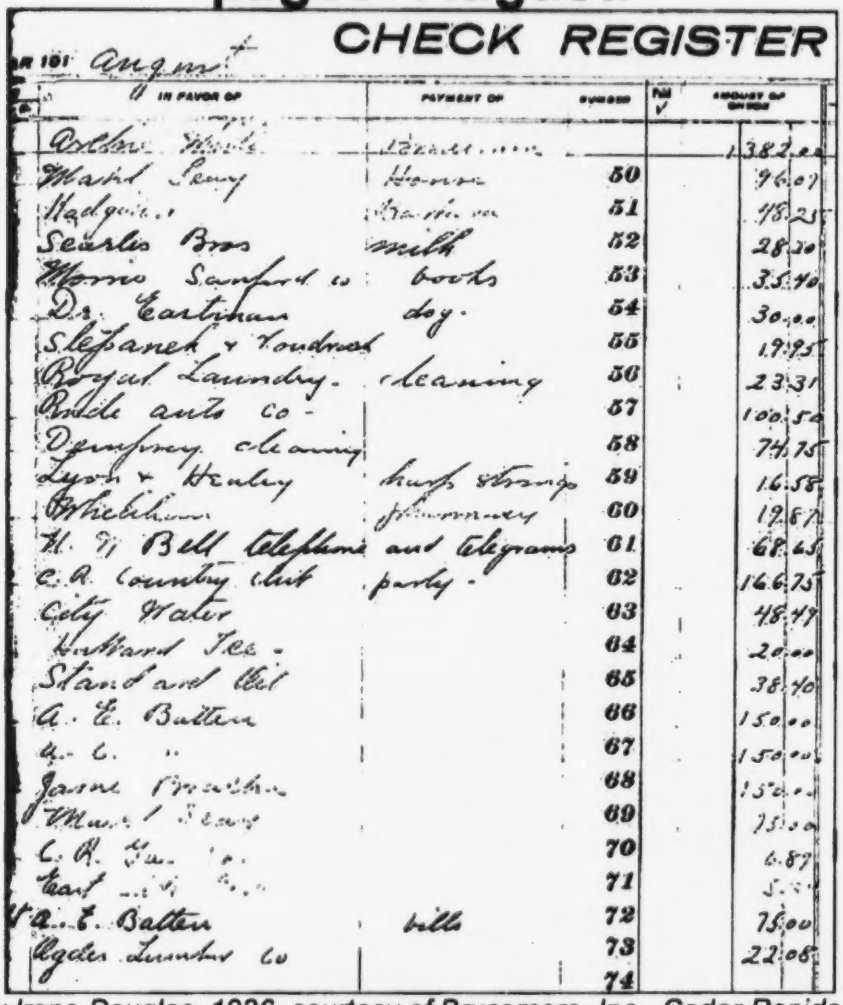
# Document 2B: Douglas account book pages--August.



CHECK REGISTER

| | IN FAVOR OF | PAYMENT OF | NUMBER | PAID V | AMOUNT OF CHECK |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Order [illegible] | [illegible] | | | 1382.00 |
| | Mabel Seery | Honor | 50 | | 96.07 |
| | Hodgson | [illegible] | 51 | | 18.25 |
| | Searles Bros | milk | 52 | | 28.20 |
| | Morris Sanford Co | books | 53 | | 35.40 |
| | Dr. Earthman | dog. | 54 | | 30.00 |
| | Slepanek & Voudrach | | 55 | | 19.95 |
| | Royal Laundry. | cleaning | 56 | | 23.31 |
| | Riddle auto Co - | | 57 | | 100.50 |
| | Dempsey cleaning | | 58 | | 74.75 |
| | Lyon & Healey | harp strings | 59 | | 16.58 |
| | Whelihan | [illegible] | 60 | | 19.87 |
| | H. T. Bell telephone | and telegrams | 61 | | 68.65 |
| | C.R. Country Club | party. | 62 | | 166.75 |
| | City Water | | 63 | | 48.47 |
| | Hubbard Tea - | | 64 | | 20.00 |
| | Standard Oil | | 65 | | 38.40 |
| | A. E. Batten | | 66 | | 150.00 |
| | A. C. " | | 67 | | 150.00 |
| | Jane [illegible] | | 68 | | 150.00 |
| | Mrs. J. Seery | | 69 | | 75.00 |
| | C. R. Gas Co. | | 70 | | 6.87 |
| | Kant [illegible] | | 71 | | 5.00 |
| | A. E. Batten | bills | 72 | | 75.00 |
| | Ogden Lumber Co | | 73 | | 22.06 |
| | | | 74 | | |

*(Kept by Irene Douglas, 1926, courtesy of Brucemore, Inc., Cedar Rapids, Iowa)*

**Questions for Documents 2A & 2B**

1. Using the account book, find entries with the names of servants listed in Chart 1. Which servants appear to have the highest wages? Why do you think some servants were paid more?

2. Look at some of the other entries in the account book. How do servants' wages compare to other expenses?

3. Do you think servants were paid enough? Explain your answer.



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# Putting It All Together

"Back Stairs at Brucemore: Life as Servants in early 20th-Century America" invites students to explore the clues revealing the stories of servants at Brucemore, as well as the pros and cons of working in a factory versus domestic service. The following activities are designed to help students understand servant stereotypes, the housework needed to maintain a local historic home, working women in early 20th-century factories, and different uses for historic buildings.

**Activity 1: The Ideal and the Real**

Images of servants were included in magazines and newspapers around the turn-of-the-century and provide insight into the way others viewed servants. Have students research and photocopy advertisements, articles, advice columns, and cartoons that depict servants during this time period. Have students create bulletin boards using each of these categories as titles: realistic, idealized, or negative. Hold a class discussion with students defining the three categories, determining the point-of-view being represented, and deciding on which bulletin board each image should be posted. Discuss and consider the stereotypes that these images encourage.

Then, students should research the contemporary "Help Wanted" section of the local newspaper and copy ads for different servant positions. As a class, compare and contrast the want ads to the bulletin board of images using the following questions. Considering that the most common houseworker was a maid-of-all-work, were the students able to locate ads for that position? What were the responsibilities listed for a maid-of-all-work? What were the responsibilities for other positions such as butler, cook, chauffeur, nanny, etc.? What responsibilities might a male servant have compared to a female worker? Are the images of servants accurate? Do the advertisements depicting servants meet the needs and duties listed in the help wanted sections? How might stereotypes presented in the media effect relationships between servants and their employers?

**Activity 2: Built-in Service**

Whether it be a turn-of-the-century mansion with built-in space designed for servants or a log cabin and farm that housed a single family unable to afford hired house help, all historic homes had someone who worked hard to maintain it. Have students visit a local historic home and determine how the work was done and who did it. Students should collect floor plans and bring them to class for discussion on the following questions. What is the style and size of the house? What class of people lived in the home? Who maintained the housework for the home and how? How does the technology used to do housework differ from what is available today? Can you tell whether there were servants? Why or

why not? What "work" spaces can you identify in the home? What are they used for now? How does this compare to Brucemore? What architectural characteristics do these homes share with Brucemore? How are they different? How is the use of space different? Does the present-day interpretation staff discuss how the work was done at the home or if there were servants? If not, why? If it is not possible to visit a site, contact a local historical society or library to find out where you can write and request information about a site that meets the needs of this project.

**Activity 3: Factory Work vs. Domestic Service**

Mary Trueblood, author of the article "Housework versus Shop and Factories" investigated women's working conditions for Massachusetts' Bureau of Labor. Most states had similar departments that conducted safety inspections and recorded accidents as well as the numbers and wages of men, women, and children working in factories. Their published reports are gold mines of information about working conditions of the past. Have students visit their local library and research women's work opportunities in early 20th-century America. Students should find out if reports of their state's Bureau of Labor Statistics are available. If statistics are broken down by city, have them look at local industries. Ask the librarian for further research resources related to the topic. A list of suggested books is available in this lesson's Supplementary Resource section. Contemporary "Help Wanted" sections of the local newspaper should also provide a wealth of information. There are also many online resources, such as the information presented on the Triangle Factory in Supplementary Resources. Ask students to take notes on what they find. Have them determine what factory work entailed as well as what the working conditions were like. Labor statistics information may include descriptions of injuries or fatalities in factories, violations of safety codes and child labor laws, and the numbers of women working in certain industries.

Upon returning to the classroom, hold a class discussion on the following questions: Were women more common at certain kinds of factories? What wages did they earn compared to men or children? How do those salaries compare to the salaries listed in the account ledgers of Brucemore in Visual Evidence? Did any of the information found on women's labor relate to household work? If so, what jobs were discussed? What were the responsibilities? How did the descriptions compare to work at Brucemore? Based on what students learned, was housework preferable to factory work?

**Activity 4: Preserving the Past**

Explain to students that Margaret Douglas Hall was the last private owner of Brucemore. She inherited the estate from her mother Irene Douglas. Margaret, who did not have children, wanted her home to be used by the community. When she died in 1981, Brucemore became a property of the National Trust for Historic

Preservation. Her home was to function as a community cultural center and also became a house museum. Identify buildings in your community that are used in a way that is different from their original purpose. Have each student create a display using historical and current photographs of a local building. Students should provide captions for the photos, explain how the building has changed over time, and how the building is being used today. Students should present their display in class and give an explanation of what the building tells them about their community's past. Have students respond to the following questions. Do you think it is important to preserve historic places? Why or why not? How would you decide which buildings to preserve in your community?

# Back Stairs at Brucemore: Life as Servants in early 20th-Century America-- Supplementary Resources

By studying *Back Stairs at Brucemore: Life as Servants in early 20th-Century America* students understand the "servant" experience in early 20th-century America, as well as the pros and cons for women working in factories versus domestic service. Those interested in learning more will find that the Internet offers a variety of interesting materials.

**Brucemore http://www.brucemore.org/**

Brucemore is a property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Visit Brucemore's website for visitation information, and for more information on the history of this house, the families that lived there, and the servants that kept the home running. Also included is information about the house as a community cultural center, with numerous activities for the public.

**National Trust for Historic Preservation http://www.nthp.org/**

Chartered in 1949 by Congress, the National Trust is dedicated to preserving historic neighborhoods and properties throughout the United States. Their website provides links to their historic properties, including Brucemore, and additional resources.

**Public Broadcast Service: America 1900**
**http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/1900/index.html**

America 1900 presents a comprehensive picture of what life was like in the United States at the turn of the century. The Web site offers compelling images, information, and documents about American life. PBS also offers a related Teacher's Guide section [http://www.pbs.org/teachersource/]. The site also provides an amazing resource called 1900 House[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/1900house/]. Originally this was presented as a TV series that followed a modern middle-class family "transported" back in time (1900) and living in a house restored to the period. The website provides detailed information on what it was like to live in an average home at the turn of the century. A virtual tour allows one to explore a home with little indoor plumbing, no heating or electricity, a kitchen with few modern amenities, and much more.

**The Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record Collection http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/hhquery.html**
Search the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record Collection for information, photographs, and drawings of Brucemore.

**American Memory Digital Collection, Library of Congress**
**http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/mdbquery.html**
Search the American Memory Collection for various primary sources related to the themes presented in this lesson plan. Use search terms such as immigration; servants; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; working women, and factories and sweat shops.

**Modern History Sourcebook**
**http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook.html**
The Modern History Sourcebook is one of a series of internet history primary sourcebooks created by the History Department of Fordham University in New York. Included on their web page is information about immigration in the U.S., the Gilded Age, the first and second Industrial Revolution, and much more.

**Cornell University Library: The Triangle Factory Fire**
**http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/**
For a unique perspective of working in a factory "sweatshop" explore this web exhibit that presents original documents and secondary sources on the Triangle Fire, held by the Cornell University Library. They are housed in the Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

**Kingwood College Library - American Cultural History: The Twentieth Century http://www.nhmccd.edu/contracts/lrc/kc/decades.html**
The purpose of this web & library guide is to help the user gain a broad understanding and appreciation of culture and history for each decade of 20th-century America.

**For Further Reading**
For further reading about working women and factory work consider the following useful works: Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford U. P., 1982); Catherine Gourley, *Good Girl Work: Factories, Sweatshops, and How Women Changed Their Role in the American Workforce* (Brookfield, CT: Millbrook, 1999); Rosalyn Baxandall, *America's Working Women: a Documentary History, 1600 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995, rev. ed.); Philip Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement* (New York: The Free Press, 1982); and Lynn Weiner, *From*

*Working Girl to Working Mother: the Female Labor Force in the U.S., 1820-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of N.C. Press, 1985).

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